



Activism and intentionality in international alternative breaks: Civic education, global community, and service learning

Bryan McNeil, Assistant Professor, American University [mcneil.bryan@gmail.com]

Eve Bratman, Assistant Professor, American University [bratman@american.edu]

Shoshanna Sumka, Assistant Director, Global Learning and Leadership, American University
[sumka@american.edu]

Kelsey Alford-Jones, Director, Guatemala Human Rights Commission [kajones@ghrc-usa.org]

Marney Coleman, student leader, American University [mc4286a@student.american.edu]

Illana Lancaster, Assistant Professor, American University [lancaste@american.edu]

Keywords: Alternative break, international service-learning, social justice, student leadership, program description

Conference track: Global community engagement and comparative studies

Format: Team inquiry presentation

Summary

The Alternative Break program at American University, which consists of predominantly international trips, is administered by the Center for Community Engagement and Service. The program is unique in

three ways. First, student leadership is a foundational conceptual framework of the program. Second, the program is committed to addressing social justice by pursuing political and social change at a structural level. Our trips are designed to achieve this ambitious goal through our third unique characteristic: the commitment to building and maintaining lasting relationships with our community partners.

This team inquiry presentation will include the Director of Guatemala Human Rights Commission (a community partner organization), the Assistant Director of Service Learning, student leaders, and several faculty advisors from trips to Guatemala, South Africa, and Kenya. We will present findings of what we believe to be a unique community-based service-learning program.

The Alternative Break director will detail the student-leadership model that is central to the entire program. She will also describe our collaborative work with other universities, specifically around the Haiti Compact, which focuses on organizing and pooling resources in order to address the social issues in that country in a responsible, thoughtful, and sustainable way.

Student leaders will represent the complex role they are expected to fill as planners, organizers, team-builders, group facilitators, and peer-leaders. They are in a unique position to present the central characteristics of the program and the outcomes associated with student participation.

Faculty members will contribute perspectives on community-based service learning from their disciplinary theoretical orientations and present common themes that have grown out of the overall Alternative Break program in recent years.

Together, team presenters will address several outcomes we believe to be unique to the American University program due to our explicit focus on social justice.

References

Crabtree, R. D. (2008). Theoretical foundations for international service-learning. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, 15(1), 18–36.